



Writing Cover Letters

Professional Development – Job Applications

For many students getting ready to graduate and enter the working world, the prospect of applying for jobs can be a daunting one. You have to not only find the right position, but also provide excellent materials such as a resume and cover letter that will attract the eye of your (hopefully) future employer. This document will provide strategies and tips for what is considered by many to be the most difficult part of completing the application process: Writing a strong cover letter.

Overview

A cover letter is an explanation of two things. One is to demonstrate the reasons why you are highly qualified and the right person for the job. The other is to show your level of interest in the position. Both of these are vitally important to a strong cover letter

These days, cover letters might be the most important aspect of the job application process, and should be custom designed to the specific position and requirements of the job description. Having one generic cover letter will simply not do. This can often be a very tedious and time-consuming process, but will ultimately result in your success in acquisition of the job position you want.

When reading a job description, one will often find two main sections, which are the minimum requirements and the desired skills of a candidate. The first thing you should do is carefully read these two sections and make sure that you are qualified. If the job description says that the person needs a minimum of five years of experience and you only have one, you are likely wasting your time in completing the application. This, however, is not always the case, and if you feel especially connected to the job, then you should apply. But remember, the less you fit the minimum and skill requirements, the more you will have to work to make your application stand out!



Once you have checked these two sections, and believe the job to be an ideal match with your qualifications and skills, it is time to look at the application requirements. All jobs will require some kind of resume, and the vast majority also ask for a cover letter. Below are some tips that should help you.

Tips

1. Your Contact Information

If you do not have letterhead, it is important to create one with your name, address, phone number and email address. This is essential to have at the top of your cover letter so that the hiring manager can easily contact you in the case that they would like to move you through the interview and hiring process. Your letterhead should look attractive and simple. Color is acceptable, but in moderate doses. An example of letterhead might look like this:



The letterhead should look professional and clean. Also—make sure your email address is professional as. No one will write you at cutebabyjohn@hotmail.com--so get a new one if you have to! One more thing: No pictures please.

2. Greeting

Make sure you know to whom you need to address the cover letter. It should say directly in the job description. Some examples include "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Google Hiring Team". Another option is "To Whom It May Concern", however this is less applicable because you should know generally whom you are addressing. If the person's name is written in the job application, you should certainly address them directly. If using the person's name, be careful to address them with a title such as Mr. or Mrs. and their last name only. When addressing women, if you do not know if they are married, use the title Ms.

3. Paragraph One—Introduction

The first paragraph should include a very brief introduction of your name and for which job you are applying/interested. This allows the hiring manager to easily categorize you if they have multiple positions to fill, and maintains the formal nature of the letter. Do not immediately begin telling them about your passions and/or the reasons you are their ideal candidate—that will come later. Keep it short, sweet and to the point.



4. Paragraph Two—Background and Experience

Once you have introduced yourself and stated your desire to apply for a certain position, it is time to provide your background and experience. There are *do's* and *don'ts* in this section to be aware of. *DO* make sure that the way in which you frame your experience matches with the job description. Highlighting the important parts of your experience and showing how they match the job will certainly pique interest in your profile. But *DON'T* simply list your experience—that is best left to your resume. Instead, choose two or three specific aspects of your experience and speak about how those things have been important components of your work or what they have taught you about the workplace. This is your opportunity to make it personal and sell your most important skills.

5. Paragraph Three—Why You Fit the Job

Now is your time to sell yourself to the hiring manager. Your strategy in this section should be to take those experiences that you gained in your previous jobs and demonstrate how those relate directly to the requirements of the job description. Further, you should talk about how you can help to bring your unique perspective to the job, and inspire them to *want* you as a valuable employee. It is also helpful here to talk about your philosophies, strengths and goals as their future employee. By giving the hiring manager or team a crystal clear idea of these things, they can have a very strong idea of who you are and what you could represent for their workplace.

6. Paragraph Four—Conclusion and Signature

Paragraph four serves as a bookend to paragraph one, providing a brief conclusion stating, for instance, “for the above reasons, I believe myself to be an ideal fit at your company”. You should also thank the reader for their time and include that you hope to hear from them. Finally, sign the letter.

7. One More Thing!

Remember that this letter is a snapshot of your experiences and philosophies and should in no sense be completely comprehensive. Instead, this should get the hiring manager interested in you as an employee, and make them want to invite you to the interview round of the process. For this reason, the cover letter should *never* be more than one page in length. Whatever you want to say, it can definitely be said in less than a page. This rule should seldom be broken.

These rules are certainly not hard and fast, and are flexible. But using this format is an excellent starting place for anyone entering the treacherous arena of job applications.